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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

CROSSING CULTURES: SELF IDENTITY IN THE WRITING OF SUNITI NAMJOSHI.

BY

MARGARET ANN BOWERS

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Edmonton, Alberta
SPRING 1993

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Crossing Cultures: Self Identity in the Writing of Suniti Namjoshi**, submitted by **Margaret Ann Bowers** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Arts**.

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Date: 19 November, 1992

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the work of Suniti Namjoshi, an Indian lesbian feminist who writes in English, and whose work has received little critical attention.

The study focuses on her prose fiction and evaluates the political debate in her writing regarding her concept of self and that self's relationship with society. The discussion deals specifically with the problems of self identity for those marginalised by patriarchal society, that is women, particularly lesbians, and subjects in a colonial or cross-cultural context.

The first chapter examines the text in which Namjoshi reveals and revises the patriarchal tradition in mythological literature and thereby liberates marginalised identities from the limitations imposed by patriarchy.The second chapter examines the progression of three of Namjoshi's characters to an understanding of the concept of a post-structural self from which a feminist utopian community is postulated. This utopia is evaluated in the concluding chapter.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BDF *The Blue Donkey Fables*

BI *Because of India*

FF *Feminist Fables*

MMD *The Mothers of Maya Diip*

Introduction

Thinking over my interest in Namjoshi's writing, I recall reading The Mothers of Maya Diip, attracted by the mix of fantasy and feminism that the dust cover promised. I was also intrigued by the fact that the writer was an Indian woman living in Britain. I come from an area of Britain with a large East Indian population (West Yorkshire), which for the most part lives in cultural and economic segregation from the other communities. From a young age I have been acutely aware of separations between social or cultural groups as I grew up a Catholic in a predominantly Protestant area of a country with an infamous and long history of anti-Catholicism. My awareness of the segregation in my own town provided a sense of affinity with other marginal groups within West Yorkshire. However, the experience of segregation for a white Catholic girl is greatly different and less intense than that of other groups, particularly that of the large Pakistani communities to whom a white girl is a privileged member of the society in which they are marginal.

I was curious to discover what an Asian feminist had to say and whether the segregation which imposed boundaries between communities in West Yorkshire could be broken down within feminism. In short, I was attracted by the possibility of a multicultural feminist community of thought, based on human equality, where segregation would not occur and where

all groups in society could communicate with each other. As I read Namjoshi's work I found that it provides a feminist concept of community, which, although utopian, provides a direction for those, like me, who have been caught up in a segregated world where difference appears as a boundary.

As I began to read I was fascinated that The Mothers of Maya Diip could not be interpreted as a text written in an Indian cultural context. The text appeared to be truly cross-cultural in that it was an amalgam of cultural contexts: it was written in English (as all Namjoshi's texts are) and had no identifiable, isolated, Indian cultural reference; in fact her text appeared to be written by a woman whose perspective contains many varied cultural reference points. I want to make a distinction between "transcultural", which implies movement from one distinct cultural context to another, and the "cross-cultural", which implies that cultural contexts cross over and influence each other so that new cultural perspectives do not eradicate their predecessors but intermingle with them. This term suggests that cultural contexts are created between people in interaction, and that the cultural melanges are personal and unique, so that the personal cultural experiences intermingle to create a psychological cultural make-up: a personal cultural context.

My experience of living in Canada as a British student has given me an understanding that the experience of alternative cultures can create a heightened political

consciousness as the experience emphasises one's self-consciousness and relationship to the community. I attribute Namjoshi's extraordinary insight into the complexities of self-identity and the self's relation to society to her cross-cultural background.

Namjoshi was born in India in 1941, into a high caste Hindu family. She is a lesbian with no history of heterosexuality and was accepted by her family as a lesbian on condition she was "discreet" (BI 9) about it. She was educated in English in which she writes her texts, and also writes Hindi and speaks Marathi. She published her first book, Poems, through the Calcutta Writers Workshop in 1967, but she now regards it as limited as it was written before her interest in sexual politics developed. In fact it was her move to the United States, to Missouri, to take a Public Administration course in 1968 which initiated her progressive understanding and insight into feminist and sexual politics. Until then she had worked in a prestigious position for the Indian Administration Service. In 1968 in Missouri she suffered from "culture shock" (BI 14) during which she felt lost without the privilege which her social position brought her in India.

She settled in Montreal in 1969 to study for a PhD in English Literature at McGill University and resigned from the India Administration Service. At McGill she considered her most educational experience to have been living in poverty

and "experiencing the social hierarchy at the bottom end of the system" (BI 21). While living in Montreal she published two more collections of her poems through the Calcutta Writers Workshop: More Poems (1971) and Cyclone in Pakistan (1971). In 1972 she took a teaching post at Scarborough College, University of Toronto, hoping that it would allow her to dedicate her time to writing. During the first six years of teaching she managed to write two collections of poems: The Jackass and the Lady (1980), and The Authentic Lie (1982) her first book published outside India (in Fredericton, New Brunswick).

Her feminist, sexual and social political consciousness was developing gradually during this time but it was not until she took a sabbatical year in England (1978-79) that her political thinking was transformed. In London she was impressed by meeting a community of lesbian and gay people, whereas previously she had only met homosexuals as "isolated individuals" (BI 78). She found that the increased contact with homosexuals enabled her to consider questions of lesbian identity and how lesbians related to other people in society. The result was that she felt "enormously relieved to find that I wasn't isolated in my questioning of the prevailing order" (BI 78).

In England she was particularly influenced by a friend, Christine Donald, who guided Namjoshi's reading and inspired her to write Feminist Fables (1981). From this point on

Namjoshi imagined she addressed Donald in her writing, helping her to write with a specific audience in mind, one whose "literary judgement and political awareness" (BI 83) she respected. Living in Toronto from 1981 to 1986 Namjoshi was at her most prolific as a writer, despite feeling restricted by her academic duties. From 1981 to 1983 she wrote a book of poetry From the Bedside Book of Nightmares (1984); simultaneously she wrote a children's book called Aditi and The One-Eyed Monkey (1984), a prose satire The Conversations of Cow (1983), a series of poems in collaboration with Gillian Hanscombe called Flesh and Paper (1986), and The Blue Donkey Fables (1988).

After these prolific years Namjoshi decided to fulfil her original desire to be a full-time professional writer and resigned from Scarborough College in 1988. She moved to Devon, England, where funding was available for writers, and has since written a prose satire The Mothers of Maya Diip (1989), and a selection of extracts from her writing with retrospective notes about the writing process called Because of India (1989).

For the purposes of this thesis I have limited the texts I consider to her prose works. My interest in her formal innovations focuses on the fable. The revision of this folkloric form appeals to me as a very political act, an action which indicates the intention to re-form thought from its base. I have concentrated on her later works, written

after her visit to England, because of the heightened political insights that they afford me. I have not included the collaborated work Flesh and Paper as I wish to concentrate particularly and specifically upon Namjoshi's writing, which cannot be distinguished and extracted from the collaborated poems. I will add, however, that Namjoshi's involvement in the collaboration is highly significant in terms of her formal experimentation because it indicates her political movement towards intertextuality and a relinquishment of the writer's "ego".

Namjoshi's writing is innovative and liberating. The form of her writing reveals and revises stagnant forms of writing. Her content works towards revealing limiting systems of thought, and concentrates on revealing the limitations of patriarchy. She negotiates patriarchy by contesting restrictive attitudes which are accepted as the norm and rewrites mythologies which define women negatively. Thus she loosens the grasp of power over marginal groups such as women, and in particular, lesbians. As Diane McGifford comments: "This combination of formal innovation and radical content generates fresh perspectives and exposes closed systems" (5).

I was led by Namjoshi's references to "warring egos" (BI 83) to examine her concept of self through a theoretical perspective based on Hegel and viewed through the feminist perspective of Simone de Beauvoir. The suitability of these

theories is not because Namjoshi openly bases her work on them but because her work contains echoes of theories or statements by Hegel and de Beauvoir. For instance, the concept of "warring egos" is a paraphrase of Hegel's theory. Namjoshi's writing does not adhere to these theories but uses them as a base from which to elaborate, negotiate and produce her own political vision. Hegel believed that self is a process and yet he limited possible interaction betweem selves to a system of opposition. Namjoshi's feminist politic develops the dialectical nature of Hegel's theory and develops its possible multiplicity. Ultimately Namjoshi's concept of self is post-structuralist: self is a process, unfixed and multiple, influenced by and mutually influencing all it perceives.

As a starting point Namjoshi assumes the existence of limiting systems of thought and power, in particular patriarchy and imperialism, which circumscribe women, lesbians and colonial subjects. Despite her national and cultural awareness, illustrated by the name of her semi-autobiographical text Because of India, Namjoshi's concerns concentrate on the issues of women, and particularly lesbians, across cultures.

Namjoshi frees her writing from these limitations by a process which revises works that exclude and so creates a text where fluidity and equality are emphasised. Although Namjoshi does not refer to these theories in her notes on

writing in Because of India, I would argue that her concepts are most clearly described in terms of Elizabeth Meese's cross-cultural feminism. Meese proposes a "polyphonous" feminist community ((Ex)Tensions 2) consisting of multiple centres of localised power in which no one is marginalised. She also believes that self and identity are processes arising from the relationships between people. Her literary theory emphasises the process of theory, and suggests that value is not in things but is created in ever-changing relationships between texts, between the text and the reader, and between readers. Her theory complements Barthes' theory of intertextuality and emphasises that intertextuality allows the breaking down of barriers and restrictions to writing and reading.

The result of Namjoshi's formal innovations is best described in terms of Barthes' post-structural theory of intertextuality. Barthes emphasises the lack of boundaries and hierarchy between texts. He claims that texts are never ending processes which exist only as discourse, constantly interacting with other texts. They exist only in the reading process and consequently cannot be valued as separate entities.

The importance of Namjoshi's work is that she suggests a vision of a feminist community where there is an acceptance of the equality of all humans. Her community is cross-cultural and no one cultural perspective is prioritised. It

consists of people of different races, sexes and sexual preferences. This is achieved through the understanding that all humans exist through interaction and mutual influence. The extraordinary aspect of her work is that this vision is not abstractly suggested, but through her revisions of the structure of discourse she produces a text which is based upon these very principles, that is, mutual influence from a community of texts without boundaries and hierarchy. The textual characteristics in turn allow the concepts of feminist self and community to be expressed and developed without limitation from patriarchal constraints.

I approach this thesis in terms of the writing process. The first chapter establishes the limitations that Namjoshi--and women--face when they attempt to express themselves either in writing or in society. Using this as a starting point I examine how Namjoshi uses the revisionary process to negotiate and free herself, and by implication women as a group, from the limitations patriarchy imposes. My conviction is that the revisionary writing process breaks down barriers to writing and clears a creative space in which the structure of discourse mirrors the structure of the political theory directing the writing. The second chapter contains an exploration of the concept of self and community proposed by Hegel which Namjoshi builds upon to create a concept of self and community that satisfies the cross-cultural feminist politic. This politic requires that self and community should

be ever-changing processes that take into account multiple perspectives.

CHAPTER 1

Namjoshi's Writing Process: "Crossing Cultures, Another Set of (Canonical) Boundaries"[1]

> Consider the bare bones of literature, the myths, the folk tales, the skeletal structures. Are these unchangeably patriarchal? Surely the essence of a myth is that it is only a structure for formulating human thoughts and human emotions (Suniti Namjoshi, "Poetry or Propaganda" 15).

The assumption made throughout Namjoshi's writing is that patriarchy is a negative system that needs to be changed. The implication of the epigraph above is that she is excluded from patriarchy, and is barred from the defining power of Literature by patriarchy. This bars her from the "bare bones" of literature on which thoughts and emotions are formulated, and through which the world is defined. This chapter is an exploration of the way in which Namjoshi creates an entrance for herself to literature and by doing so breaks down the patriarchal boundaries. I will examine Namjoshi's creation of a form of writing and her breaking down of the limitations imposed on her as a female writer by

---

[1] Elizabeth Meese, (Ex)Tensions,36.

mythology and the traditions established in the "canon" of literature.

To clarify these statements I will define my use, and my understanding of Namjoshi's use, of the term "patriarchy" (see The Oxford English Dictionary, 11:347). Briefly, patriarchy is an ordering system of society which is controlled by laws established by men, and it is the prevalent social ordering system in the modern world. The system is monological, as it takes only the male perspective into account. In this tradition women are "always already" defined (Miller, 117) by patriarchy with a set of preconceived identities and characteristics which deny them the power of definition and autonomy. Simone de Beauvoir noted, and Monique Wittig has since echoed, that women have been defined by patriarchal society under a single identity, "woman". De Beauvoir protests that according to patriarchy woman "is all, that is, on the plane of the inessential; she is all the other" (229). This identity is a myth that is not founded on the characteristics of women and which can not be realised by any woman. In other words, the preconceived patriarchal "woman" does not exist and women cannot recognise themselves in this identity.

The extent of the authority of patriarchy is such that each assumption needs to be revised individually to break down the limitations it imposes. As she is a woman, Namjoshi's writing is opposed and restricted by the

patriarchal traditions of the canon. These traditions include the assumption that women's writing can be dismissed because women will write about themselves or about trifling subjects. The canon is a patriarchal ordering system which defines literary value and creates a hierarchy of texts; it relies upon accordance with a single perspective that privileges males. Meese describes the canon as "a continuous narrative (one of progress, relationship between texts and homogeneity) concerning what is valued" (<u>(Ex)Tensions</u> 29): "The canon, in other words, functions as a codification of literary identity and (as) value, striking relationships among those texts which can be integrated without rupture into its schema" (<u>(Ex)Tensions</u> 30). Namjoshi assumes feminism to offer a means to freedom from the restrictions of patriarchy and uses this as a starting point that enables her to write. She notes that "It is not literature that bars women. It's the patriarchal tradition that imposes inhibitions on us. What feminism does is to release us from these inhibitions" ("Poetry and Propaganda" 18). In order to de-bar herself from literature and mythology, Namjoshi's writing enters into an intertextual relationship with patriarchal texts with the aim of revising them from a feminist perspective.

Barthes notes that texts are continually overlapping and crossing-over one another, so that the relationship between them becomes one of mutual, and yet irreducible, influence: "The intertextuality in which any text is apprehended, since

it is itself the intertext of another text, cannot be identified with some **origin** of the text" (60). On the other hand, he claims that works of literature are independent and isolated, they are concrete and can be placed on "examination syllabuses" (Barthes 57). Barthes's essay "From Work to Text" traces the difference between a work and a text: "the work is held in the hand, the text is held in language" (57); the text is the activated work which cannot be isolated and "it cannot be caught up in a hierarchy, or even in a simple distribution of genres" (58).

Namjoshi creates texts by revising patriarchal works and placing the texts in an intertextual relationship where they cannot be ordered and valued as separate entities. She negotiates the relationship between her writing and patriarchal texts, so that a relationship of opposition (where the patriarchal work excludes the feminist text) becomes changed to one of revision, where the two texts are interwoven and disallow the creation of boundaries between them. In other words, Namjoshi places her writing outside the patriarchal text (in the manner that women are placed outside tradition in the position of "other") and works her way into the intertextual relationship of revision, breaking down the boundaries that hold women's writing in a position exterior to the hierarchical canon.

Jan Montefiore recognises the possibilities that exist within the contradictory position of women revisionary

writers. She admits that "as women we do not officially belong to the traditions that may engage us" (Montefiore 20) but, like Namjoshi, she advocates revision of these traditions: the mythologies and literature. The importance of this, she explains, is that "using this material seems to be a way of at once escaping the constructive hierarchies of tradition and gaining access to the powers of definition" (Montefiore 56). This process enables Namjoshi to recover the "bare bones" of literature for the feminist, the power to redefine under a new set of principles based on equality. Namjoshi appears to be answering the call by Adrienne Rich to women writers: "We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" (35).

The following analysis of Namjoshi's fables displays the intertextual relationship of opposition to patriarchal mythology and the canon, and reveals the means by which Namjoshi negotiates this relationship to deconstruct the patriarchal authority and the limitations that it imposes. This will be carried out by examining the revisions with which Namjoshi deconstructs established authority and produces a space for her work which is not "always already" defined and valued. The methods of her revisions and the elements which she chooses to revise reveal the characteristics of the space which she attempts to create. This space is not easily confined to one category. The space

is beyond the limits of boundaries and borders and denies their authority. Comparing literature to mathematics, Namjoshi notes:

> the thing about mathematics is that it makes beautiful patterns within self-contained systems. Jumping systems is disastrous....In literature, on the other hand, some of the best results are obtained by using several systems simultaneously... (BI 104).

Revision of form

The success of Namjoshi's collections of short stories is the result of her experiments with form. The experiments that she makes are in reaction to the assumptions and opposition to women's writing made from a patriarchal perspective. Namjoshi notes that the main opposition to women's writing from a patriarchal perspective is "The assumption...that from a woman's perspective her own preoccupations and her daily life are likely to be of primary importance" ("Poetry or Propaganda" 4). Similarly, Esha Dey, an Indian creative writer, claims that she finds writing as a woman difficult because "you are caught between these two extremes...the unreal world of romance, or this exaggerated world of'shit and beans'" (34). In other words, she feels trapped between the form of romance which is a form "allowed" women writers and which results in a prolongation of the traditional representation of woman, and the

pessimistic bitter realism which works only in opposition to patriarchy.

Namjoshi's writing, I find, works its way out of these predicaments. Her most experimental and distinctive writing either uses the fable form to invent new stories or borrows personified animals and fantastical animals from Indian fables. The human experiences in her writing are thereby distanced away from herself and the notion that her writing is about her personal daily life, and yet provides an opportunity for her to make political insights which are "potently feminist in nature" (McGifford and Kearns, introduction).

Considering Namjoshi's assertion that folk tales are a part of the "bare bones" of literature, the use of fable (which is a type of folk tale) gives Namjoshi access to the base that defines the literary canons. In a study of the fable H. J. Blackham traced the fable form back to oral culture which existed prior to written culture (212). Namjoshi's writing enacts a process of reaching to the origins of literature by using the fable form derived from oral culture, and "translating" it into the contemporary context of English Literature and feminist theory.

The fable is a form of literature which has been defined and attributed with specific elements and functions. It has been so clearly defined that it is a recognised literary genre. The existence of the genre of fable has implications

that a piece of writing may be considered successful only if it follows the definition accurately. H.J. Blackham promotes the idea that the fable form is a genre of writing. He describes a fable as a fictitous story that pictures a truth (i). He claims that they are distanced from historical time and are populated by animals in order to avoid engaging human sympathies and allowing the reader to think about human behaviour with "detachment" (203).

Namjoshi revises each of these elements in order to emphasise her opposition to their fixity. Consider the idea that a fable pictures a truth. This idea limits the text to one authoritative meaning. There is no possibility of attributing to the fable any other meaning without being accused of being "wrong" by those whose definitions of fables have been accepted as absolute. By the use of irony and play with the form of endings Namjoshi deconstructs this defining element of the fable. For example, the section titled "Triptych" in The Blue Donkey Fables (96-97) offers three alternative versions of a basic fable plot and thus denies the existence of a single interpretation or defining truth.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary a triptych is a set of three writing tablets, pictures or operas. The set can be considered as associated pieces that constitute one art work, or the central picture may be dominant and the side pictures complementary to it. Namjoshi's triptych consists of three differing versions of the same tale in which a cow is

befriended by a lion cub. The three sections are associated through the shared plot features and none of the three versions of the tale is dominant. Each represents the tale through differing planes of reality: the first section presents the characters as non-specific and therefore ordinary to the reader's imagination; the second section presents the characters as extra-ordinary, attributed with mythical qualities; and the third section presents the characters as fantastical. Due to the differing planes of reality no one version eliminates the other two; they exist as three differing and non-contradictory versions of the same tale. Namjoshi thereby brings the reader to accept that there are multiple possible readings, and writings, of the fable and no one perspective is definitive.

Each representation of the characters alters the endings of the fable and provides multiple endings. In the first section the reader is encouraged to read the fable from the perspective of a "placid cow" (BDF 96) (the reader's attention is drawn by the italicized subject of the fable). The tale recounts how an engaging and energetic lion cub and a quietly grazing cow become friends with the result that the cub begs the cow for some beef and the cow complies. The tale is told in conventional fable form, with an omniscient narrator telling a timeless tale about two personified animals. The reader expects at the end of the tale to be provided with a moral truth, but Namjoshi anticipates this:

"The point of the tale? It depends rather on which of the two you identify with" (BDF 96). I read this answer hearing a tone of ironic flippancy by the writer, as though the question and answer are unnecessary and should be taken for granted. The narrator stubbornly refuses to interpret the tale for the reader. The reader is forced to consider her/his own perspective in relation to the two animals, and to recognise her/his self as the originator of the interpretation. By doing this the reader must reject the idea of an absolutely truthful interpretation.

The second version opens with the introduction of a piece of information that has been withheld in the first version; the reader's eye is drawn to the italics which emphasise "And Yet the cow we are speaking of was a Brahmini cow" (BDF 97). The cub in this version is hereditarily royal. The perspective of this version emphasises not the unlikeliness of a friendship between a cow and a cub but the glory of a friendship between a sacred Hindu cow and a Royal lion cub. The tale is extraordinary as it takes on mythical aspects associated with the cultural context of India (the friendship between a cow and a cub, for instance, alludes to the friendships between bulls and lions in the Panchatantra) and yet it is written in western biblical vocabulary. The ending focuses on the extraordinary combination resulting from the friendship: "They recalled the world before the fall. They were like milk and honey" (BDF 97). The

combination of western biblical vocabulary and Hindu mythology suggests to me that this version of the tale can be effectively read in terms of colonialism. The biblical vocabulary suggests that the friendship is viewed from a western perspective. As lions are heraldic symbols of Britain the implication is that the fable refers to the colonial occupation of India by Britain. In this utopia the colonial subject is compliant, as is the cow in this version: "she accepted gently and calmly, never once altering her docile expression" (BDF 97).

The third version, like the second, opens with the invitation to compare versions: "Conversely" (BDF 97). The ending likewise is definite and singular but the perspective is that of fantasy and the plot is an idyllic, magical, lesbian love story. The cow is a "Moon-calf" and the cub a "Lady Lioness": when the Moon-calf becomes a Moon-cow they become lovers and "pick pretty patterns in the smooth moonbeams" (BDF 97). However, Angela Carter claims that:

> When we hear "Once upon a time", or any of its variants, we know in advance that what we are about to hear isn't going to pretend to be true (introduction 12).

This third version of "Triptych" contains a single perspective, that of a lesbian utopia, which is undermined by its own fantastical nature. The fantasy in fact is a self-supporting system; because the fantastical nature is emphasised the reader does not expect to receive or elicit a

moral truth to the tale. In turn, the reader accepts the fantastical because s/he does not seek a definite truth. Thus the reader regards the utopia as fantasy.

In comparison, all three sections undermine the authority of the other sections by providing differing interpretations of the same tale. The colonial version has no authority because the first version gives the reader the freedom to produce her/his own conclusion. The lesbian utopian version has no authority and yet is possible because the first version deconstructs the expectation and desire of the reader to receive a truth.

The irony with which Namjoshi deconstructs the notion of an authoritative correct interpretation is strongest, in my opinion, when she ends a fable with a "multiple choice" question and answer. The "multiple choice" exam is familiar to many students and is in my experience one of the most infuriating and limiting methods of examination. One is given a set of limited, and yet multiple, possible answers to a given question. Only one of the answers is considered correct. However, my impulse is to write at the side of the paper "It depends". The answer assumes an authority that does not take into consideration varying contexts for the question. Namjoshi's use of the "multiple choice" question as an ending to her fables beautifully illustrates the lack of consideration of other contexts or perspectives involved in producing an authoritative "correct" meaning to a text. In

her feminist fable "The Oyster Child" (Feminist Fables 78), a diligently silent and shut oyster is cut open and her pearl is removed for admiration. Namjoshi "closes" the narrative:

> And was the oyster pleased? She was probably pleased, but for obvious reasons she said nothing.
>
> Question: Why did the oyster say nothing?
>
> a. From habit
>
> b. Because by this time she was already dead
>
> c. Out of sheer modesty (FF 78).

My "multiple choice" interpretation is "b" because the context of this question is a feminist fable and my reading strategy is that of a feminist. She is already dead because the man killed her for what she could provide for him and because he did not value her as a living oyster. The man in the fable, however, might reply with answer "a" or "c": after all, why should someone transfixed with the beauty of a pearl notice the silence of an oyster whose silence is assumed, because she has always been silent? With differing perspectives the possible answers are multiple and yet the irony is that the idea of a multiple choice question allows only one "correct" answer. All other perspectives and answers are considered incorrect. Thus, Namjoshi deconstructs the notion of a single perspective by providing multiple endings and interpretations, and she uses irony to reveal the problem of assuming the correctness of one single perspective.

Namjoshi's writing reveals a consciousness of the

formalist definitions which she negotiates and appropriates for her own revisionary uses. Leaving Namjoshi's feminist revisions for a moment, I will consider the revisions of Namjoshi's writing concerning racism. As an Indian writing in English, for a predominantly western audience, Namjoshi is surprisingly unconcerned with the political implications of writing in English and has not contributed to the debate on this subject in Indian criticism (see the work of Verghese and Naik). Her revisions concerning race concentrate more on an exploration of the relationship of imperialists to the colonised.

Here Edward Said's work on the system of Orientalism, which is as monological as patriarchy, is important to my analysis. In "The Giantess", for example, Namjoshi plays with the Orientalist's concept of time. According to Said, "the 'good' Orient was invariably a classical period somewhere in long-gone India, whereas the 'bad' Orient lingered in present day Asia..." (Orientalism 99). Namjoshi manipulates the concept of time to produce an ironical story of a utopian "Matriarchy" (which she implies is a word which has been "lost" and not replaced). The fable begins with a version of "once upon a time..." which incorporates the Orientalist's assumptions:

> Thousands of years ago in far away India, which is so far away that anything is possible, before the inevitable advent of the Aryans, a giantess was in

charge of a little kingdom (Feminist Fables 29).

The perspective of this opening is that of the Orientalist, who would consider the "advent of the Aryans" to be "inevitable", just as English Gentlemen considered themselves the only natural leaders (see Mohanty's description of the assumptions of the British concerning their racial origin, introduction 10). The term "far away India" implies that India is another nation where things are detached from recognised western reality (the reality of the defining nation). The phrase "anything is possible", written in the present tense, implies that India is a space open to be invented, where events are not actual and situated in historical time but are presently created fictions. This opening is, therefore, a validation from the Orientalist's perspective of the work of Orientalism.

The plot of this fable could be read as a humorously oversimplified suggestion of the unconscious dream motivating the male Orientalist's work. The giantess of the matriarchy is the only woman and she functions as a perfect mother to all the men, who act exactly like dependent children. Reading this brings to mind Oedipal myths and leads me to the suggestion that the Orientalist is searching for an actual historical, geographical space to manipulate and force to contain his basic unconscious desires.

Namjoshi also gives her giantess subjectivity which dismantles the Orientalist's dream. In the fable the giantess

grows tired and finds it difficult to be a mother figure. She announces that she wishes to leave but her dependent subjects beg her not to go. They offer her what they think she wants (in exchange for her continuing affection and sustenance) but she is not satisfied. The dependent demanding children have such insufficient knowledge of the giantess that they are not able to guess nor willing to offer her what she wants; she leaves and the matriarchy comes to an end. The suggestion is that even the dream that motivates the Orientalist would not be possible without the denial of subjectivity to the provider, in this case the giantess. The fiction that sustains Orientalism, in other words, is dependent upon the limiting and controlling of all the elements comprising the space of the fiction. In this fable Namjoshi releases one of the elements, that is, she gives subjectivity to her character and dissipates the dream, breaking down the imposed limitations of Orientalism.

Mary Meigs points out that the depth of Namjoshi's revisions is inherent in "the irony which comes from the suggestion of a long-ago fabled time which is really present" (67). Namjoshi also uses the distancing in time to defamiliarize human experience, to place it in a space exterior to an historical or directly personal context. This brings the experiences to the reader's attention more clearly through a new perspective.

Consider "The Snake and The Mongoose" (FF 37), which

begins "once upon a time". It is the story of a male cobra who falls in love with a female mongoose. The cobra demands her attention which she withholds until, tired of the baiting, she kills it. The fable closes with the comment, "this tale has no moral, but I might point out that not all simple minded cobras finish as victims" (FF 37). If this section is read as a modern feminist fable the final comment is highly ironic as the tale describes an experience in which the woman is usually the victim of a threatening male. The irony is heightened further when one considers Mary Meig's point that this experience is very real for many contemporary women, and in fact not fixing the story in time, rather than disengaging the reader's sympathy, makes the experience seem universal.

Namjoshi's use of animals in her fables has strong parallels to her revision of the use of the time scale. To continue an analysis of "The Snake and The Mongoose", in regard to the use of animals in this fable, one must recall that the conventional fable is presumed to have animals as characters in order to distance the experiences from the human sympathy of the reader. Said notes that: "It seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientation of direct encounters with the human" (Orientalism 93). It seems to me that to disengage human sympathy by the use of animal characters in fables is an avoidance of direct encounters with the human. However,

Namjoshi's animals actually defamiliarize human qualities and experiences, thus heightening the human sympathy of the reader.

Namjoshi comments that "To me a bird or a beast is a creature like anyone else. Hinduism, after all, is pantheistic; and the popular notion of reincarnation attributes a soul to everyone" (BI 28). However, this Hindu notion is not necessarily known or recognised by the western reader. Namjoshi concedes that "In English, things Indian became exotic" (BI 42) and she revises the animal imagery in opposition to this Orientalism. Firstly, her fables work in opposition to the already imposed imagery as she attributes the animals with the will to define their own identity. I will be examining subjectivity more closely in the next chapter but it is worth examining now in terms of the animals' affirmation of their ordinariness.

In the final section of The Blue Donkey Fables, "Nocturne" (BDF 103), the Blue Donkey finds a space to be alone where she is able to define herself. The Blue Donkey Fables includes a series of fables in which the Blue Donkey has identities imposed on her which emphasise her extraordinary colour. In opposition to this she claims "She saw herself as an ordinary creature" (BDF 103). This affirmation of her ordinariness works in conflict with the reader's perception of a fantastical speaking blue Donkey; however the human experience expressed by the donkey is

recognisable and "ordinary" and overrides the fantastical nature of the donkey. This ordinariness also has a particular political use for feminists as it provides an answer to Adrienne Rich's complaint against certain women being viewed as exceptionally gifted. In "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision", Adrienne Rich objects to the acceptance of certain gifted women by patriarchy because they are viewed by patriarchy as "special" and become "the token woman" (38). Namjoshi's emphasis on the "ordinary" resists such patronizing classifications of women.

Namjoshi also appropriates the exoticness imposed by the English language and manipulates it in opposition to Orientalism. In his essay "Tigers in Fiction", Sujit Mukherjee points out that the use of the tiger in Indian imagery is taken from the English imperialist texts in which the tiger, not previously a mythological creature, becomes in English, a symbol of India. Namjoshi incorporates this image of the tiger into her fables but changes the signification vastly. In the section "Among Tigers" (BDF 70) the image of the tiger is associated with imperialists. The narrator refers to the tigers as "The lordly race", a phrase originating in English imperialism and used as self-definition. Namjoshi therefore reverses the imagery of the tiger (the western image of the exoticness of India), associating the image with its originator onto whom the exoticness is reflected.

Revision of Mythology and Patriarchal Tradition

The revisionary form of writing with which Namjoshi negotiates the restrictions between the romance and "the shit and beans" necessarily brings her writing into confrontation with the patriarchal tradition of mythology. Simone de Beauvoir described this system, claiming "Gods made by males are the gods they worship" (174). In this system woman is

> an idol, a servant, a source of life, a power of darkness; she is the elemental silence of truth, she is artifice, gossip and falsehood; she is healthy presence and sorceress; she is man's prey, his downfall, she is everything that he is not and that he longs for (de Beauvoir 175).

The myth of Woman, created by man, contains contradictions and extremes, but Woman is denied the power of self-definition and is defined only in relation to man's desires. It is no surprise, therefore, that Mary Meigs identifies one of the problems confronting Namjoshi as the lack of creative possibility for women: "The implacable patriarchy spreads from myth to latter-day fable and discourages creative women from writing" (66).

These limitations are most strongly illustrated in the mythological figure of the female muse. The traditional muse is the inspiration of poets, their source of creativity, but not the creator. De Beauvoir notes that "A muse creates

nothing by herself; she is a calm wife Sibyl, putting herself with docility at the service of a master" (214). Woman, therefore, is defined not as a writer but only as the inspiration or object of literature, an object who is spoken for and denied the opportunity to speak for herself.

Namjoshi confronts this myth in relation to the female poet and relates, with a bitingly ironical tone, the myth of Philomel. Namjoshi explains that Philomel was transformed into the "poetic nightingale" after her tongue was cut out by her rapist. Philomel is the archetypal female poet, unable to speak and yet considered to be the source and inspiration of poetry. It is the prolongation of the myth of Philomel that Namjoshi links to the patriarchal assumption that women do not write literature concerning worthy and important subjects but only write about their personal lives (which it is assumed are of little importance). As I have discussed earlier Namjoshi considers that women writers are barred from writing literature with "a message" because they are expected to write about trifling subjects. Namjoshi's retelling of the myth of Philomel insinuates that women are restricted in what they write through fear of what they might say. She comments:

> it seems only fitting that the art she practices should be art for art's sake, and never spelt out, no--never reduced to its mere message--that would appall (FF 102).

In exploration of the idea of a female who speaks her message, Namjoshi creates feminist muses, providing them with

subjectivity--creating as it were, the woman before she was silenced. In the tale "Man-eating Mammal" Namjoshi creates a muse who resists the male poet's attempts to define and silence her. The muse is Mother Nature, the source of life, which de Beauvoir exposed as a patriarchal myth (de Beauvoir 176). The poet discovers that, by following patriarchal myth, he has created a monster beyond his control: "Mother Nature had fangs of her own, which he had not given her, and which she nastily used at unpredictable moments" (FF 96).

The poet's reaction can be read as an explanation of the many contradictory elements which constitute the myth of woman. The poet, unable to control his muse, provides new definitions and categories in order to contain her: "She became, as it were, the Wayward Woman, the Incalculable Queen. He could cope with that" (FF 96). It is only when the poet is eaten that he finally admits his muse's superior power. The poet, however, has a naivety which suggests that he too is a victim of the patriarchal tradition. Even in Mother Nature's stomach he believes he is protected (where else could one be safer than in one's mother's stomach?). His fault, it seems, was to believe in the patriarchal tradition and its protection.

Namjoshi also creates a muse for her narrator in a section which is a contemporary feminist writer's reply to Virginia Woolf's concept of the Angel in the House introduced in "Professions for Women" (Collected Essays, 284-289). The

Angel in the House is the perfect woman, in patriarchal terms, who haunts Woolf's conscience as she writes. Woolf claims that for a woman to write she must kill the Angel, and free herself from restriction. Namjoshi's "Three Angel Poems" (BDF 13-14) present a humorous exploration of the obstacles she finds to her writing as a contemporary feminist lesbian. Rather than killing her Angel Namjoshi accepts her Angel as a sort of inspirational influence and reconstructs the idea of a muse from the feminist writer's perspective.

The Angel in Namjoshi's set of three poems is called Angel and is everything that Woolf's Angel was not. Angel is also everything which a traditional muse is not. Woolf's Angel in the House is silent, diligent and without a will or opinion: "She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish" and "Above all--I need not say it--she was pure" (Woolf 285). Namjoshi's Angel is not silent but raucous: "Angel sitting on my shoulder/ is cackling loudly" (BDF 13). Rather than being an ethereal phantom of whom you hear only the "rustling of her skirts" (285), Angel is too physical, and unlike the Angel in the House she has no consideration or care for the pain she causes others, including her poet: "She leans over backwards. She loses her perch. Then digs her claws in" (BDF 13). The Angel in the House is also flattering to those who wish to be flattered, catering to every ego's needs. She advises Woolf on writing critical essays to "Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive..." (285). Angel,

however, instead of aiding Namjoshi's narrator to fame is self-flattering and condescending : "Angel smirks. "O Happy Angel. Smug Angel./ Beautiful, Delightful and Delighted Angel", "And a voice declares, /"Game set and match to Angel" (BDF 13).

In the final poem, "Unfallen Angel", which alludes to Shakespeare's Sonnet "Mine mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" (The Works of Shakespeare, 1113, Sonnet 130), the narrator compares Angel in opposition to traditional muses, the type of muse that the poet feels s/he has control over: "There are those who have muses that are kind/ and gentle, come when called, are glad to be of use" (BDF 14). She considers "Those others never shriek" (BDF 14), but this opposition is exactly what makes Angel attractive and acceptable to the narrator. She concludes: "And yet, by heav'n, though Angel struts and Angel grins / she's Angel still. Then who shall say that Angel sins?" (BDF 14). This line alludes to Shakespeare's concluding lines from the sonnet 130 "And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare / As any she belied with false compare".

The intertextual relationships between the texts which Namjoshi alludes to and her poems sets up a complex series of association which lead me to a further interpretation. Shakespeare's sonnet 130 is considered to be a comparative reply to his sonnet 43 "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?". The two sonnets contrast with each other: sonnet 43 is

a courtly love poem in which the lady is compared to beautiful natural objects and is presented as perfection. Sonnet 130, and the one to which Namjoshi alludes, is a parody of sonnet 43 as it compares the lady negatively to beautiful natural objects, admitting the object's superior beauty. The sonnet ends with an acceptance of the lady as she is and an announcement of love for her. Namjoshi describes Angel in opposition to Woolf's Angel in the House. It seems to me that Namjoshi is creating an Angel in the house which is inspirational to the feminist writer.

Namjoshi's narrator relies on Angel's outspoken, unconventional muse to lead her to be "The Incredible Woman", the exceptional, anti-conventional woman. The narrator regards herself with her muse:

> Let us examine his woman wearing this bird. Don't you care how you look? You look unkempt. You look a most unruffianly bird. And I look shy, a little tousled (BDF 14).

The implication is that the narrator is concerned with appearance and with the opinion of others whereas the rebellious Angel forces her to be unconventional. This rewriting cannot in my opinion be considered as a criticism of Woolf as the historical contexts and circumstances of the two writers are very different and their obstructions to writing would have been different. Namjoshi is exploring the perspective of the woman who, due to her feminism, lesbianism

and position as a colonial subject was not expected to be perfect, but as an "other" was expected to behave wildly unconventionally. Namjoshi's creation of Angel is an indication of the possibilities of appropriating and using the obstructions and myths of identity that are imposed on the "other". Also by assuming a muse Namjoshi places herself within an intertextual relationship with patriarchal tradition and from this point she can subvert tradition.

The insights and revisions which she arrives at are the results of examining the mythologies from differing perspectives. In particular, Namjoshi's feminist strategies lead the reader to view the texts from alternative perspectives to that of the patriarchal tradition. For example, in "The Object" (FF 121) and "Look Medusa" (BDF 59) Namjoshi presents revisions of the myth of Perseus and the Medusa. She cites The Oxford Classical Dictionary (803) as her source (although the dictionary itself refers to Ovid's Metamorphoses): "Gorgo or Medusa, a terrible monster in Greek mythology... had a round, ugly face, snakes instead of hair, a belt of the teeth of a boar, sometimes a beard, huge wings, and eyes that could transform people into stone" (472). Namjoshi quotes this in a footnote to her section titled "The Object" (FF 121), but chooses to highlight the Medusa's face, hair and eyes by omitting the description of her belt, beard and wings. I would argue that these elements are highlighted by Namjoshi because it is Medusa's ugliness which makes her

dangerous. Namjoshi in effect is highlighting the interpretation that to refuse to be "the object" of the male gaze is threatening and disturbing to men. In The Oxford Classical Dictionary Perseus is described as "a mythological hero" (803) and according to the myth Perseus killed Medusa in answer to a challenge from the King Polydectes, who was persecuting Perseus's mother. Perseus gained revenge and protected his mother by showing Medusa's decapitated head to Polydectes and turning him to stone (803).

"The Object" (FF 121), Namjoshi's first revision of the myth, describes how Perseus finds that Medusa only kills men who see her. Perseus is puzzled that only men are frozen in stone on the beach: "Perseus watched from the top of a cliff and did not understand" (FF 121). The key to why Medusa only kills men is in the vocabulary which is used to describe the sequence of events. The narrator continues that Perseus's puzzlement did not deter him because he "was a hero and a man of action" (FF 121). Perseus then proceeds to "invade her presence" (FF 121) and cuts off her head. The vocabulary indicates that Medusa only killed people who intruded into her habitat with the purpose of attacking her. Presumably, the stone men who are scattered about the beach, like Perseus, believed the patriarchal myth that they were heros, protecting patriarchy against the Medusa. This interpretation has a flaw because it assumes that only men will act in accordance with patriarchy. In addition, the title "The

Object", alludes to the idea of the "male gaze" which is an idea that does not take into account the reversal of this attention (consider the increasing female audience of male strippers) and the possible gaze of homosexuals. This flaw is corrected in the second version of the Medusa myth that Namjoshi wrote.

In "Look, Medusa!" (BDF 59), Medusa, who reputedly turned everything that saw her to stone, has control over her ability which she exercises at will. Perseus, arriving at Medusa's shore, notes that "Medusa living on a remote shore/ troubled no one" so that "he thought he might be mistaken" (BDF 59). But Perseus is the "Hero" and he has been ordered to kill Medusa. However he also desires to be recognised as her killer, "the hero". When he demands recognition Medusa kills him:

> the hidden hero burned to be seen by her whom he had come to kill." Look Medusa, I am Perseus!", he cried, thus gaining recognition before he died (BDF 59).

The interpretations to this are multiple but the fact that Perseus considers himself to be a hero in accordance with the patriarchal traditional myth of Medusa, indicates to me that he will not acknowledge that the patriarchal tradition which he follows is incorrect even when he is confronted with evidence. Perseus notes that "All was as before" (BDF 59) when he sees no evidence of Medusa's violence. The implication is that even if Medusa has changed

nothing, Perseus still cannot imagine the landscape without imagining that Medusa changed it. He believes he is the killer of Medusa, even before he attempts to slay her, and he believes that Medusa's essential function is to turn things to stone because this is the only action that patriarchal myth allows her. Like the poet and the man-eating muse, he is too naive and trusts in the protection of the patriarchal tradition. Perseus dies because he will not admit the falsity of the patriarchal myth; he will not, in effect, acknowledge that there are other (and multiple) perspectives.

Namjoshi also examines mythology and fairy tale through another perspective by applying logic and "common sense". Namjoshi quotes Lewis Carroll's Alice (from Alice in Wonderland and Alice Through the Looking Glass) as an epigraph to The Mothers of Maya Diip, and comments in Because of India " I like Alice... she tries to be logical and does her best to figure out the logic--or lack of it--in the new systems thrown at her" (104). This I feel is in accordance with Mary Meigs' perception that Namjoshi "has not restored myth to a pre-patriarchal state of non-sexism but has intervened with her own humorous ideal--of the common sense woman who resists injustice" (65).

For instance, the myth of Scylla is considered by Namjoshi, in the section titled "Scylla : An Exegesis" from The Blue Donkey Fables (53). In order to criticise the myth Namjoshi adopts a false ignorance, reveals her failed attempt

to understand the myth logically and names her attempt an "exegesis". The word "exegesis" carries the implication that interpretation bows to the authority of the text since exegesis is associated with interpretations of the scriptures (The Oxford English Dictionary, 5: 524) where respect and reverence are reserved for the interpreted text, not the interpretation. By implication this gives misplaced authority to the patriarchal versions of the myth which Namjoshi studies.

The myth of Scylla is described thus in The Oxford Classical Dictionary: "she had six heads, each with a triple row of teeth, and twelve feet. She lived on fish of all sorts, but if a ship came near enough, she would seize six men at a time from it and devour them. The only way to restrain her was to implore the intervention of her mother Cratais" (968). The Oxford Classical Dictionary cites Virgil amongst its sources for this myth (968). Virgil, to whom Namjoshi alludes in her poem, describes the Scylla as a monster whose ferociousness arouses fear in men: "the fury of Scylla" (Virgil, Book 1, 7). There is a more detailed description of the myth in Ovid's Metamorphoses, which is also cited as a source in The Oxford Classical Dictionary, in which Ovid describes Scylla as a beautiful woman before she was maliciously turned into a monster by the magic of Circe, a jealous rival. Ovid's version is far more sympathetic to Scylla, as it emphasises the tragedy and horror of being

turned into a monster, and does not hold her responsible for her actions. In comparison I suggest that Namjoshi chose to cite Virgil rather than Ovid due to Virgil's monological and authoritarian version of the myth, that is, that Scylla is a monster, and a danger, for which she must be held accountable.

The section reveals that the narrator is able to understand parts of the myth when they are placed in the context of misogynist vocabulary and in accordance with writers of the patriarchal tradition, such as Virgil. She admits "A man-eating bitch: the term is exact,/since she ate men, crunching them horribly" (BDF 53), and agrees "it's easy to see,/ if we follow Virgil and exercise tact, that in this there's a certain propriety" (BDF 53). However she claims that she does not entirely understand the logic of this misogynist myth because the myth relies on the existence of male victims. Reading the myth common-sensically she states "But there is one thing which still troubles me:/ what did the men she swallowed want to be?" (BDF 53). Namjoshi's revision of the myth of Scylla, therefore, is the application of common sense which reveals the illogicality of the patriarchal tradition that, in this myth, creates its own enemy and opposition.

Similarly, Namjoshi produces common-sense fairy tales where the characters act as ordinary people unaware of the conventions of the fairy tale which would otherwise limit

their actions. A very humorous effect is caused by the application of this idea, by Namjoshi, to the ending of the story of Cinderella in "And Then What Happened?" (FF 118). The story continues after the marriage of Cinderella and the Prince when they find they are not compatible. They are arguing because the Prince married Cinderella for her beauty and Cinderella married the Prince for his money. The Prince complains that because his money is imperishable and Cinderella's beauty is not, the marriage is not fair. Cinderella agrees with him and "simply walks out" (FF 118). Unlike a conventional fairy tale, Namjoshi attributes the characters with their own wills. Traditionally Cinderella is denied subjectivity and control over her actions; she is fated to be poor and to meet the Prince and they are fated to be happy. By assuming they are ordinary people Namjoshi attributes them with subjectivity and extends their lives beyond the tale ending with the question "AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED?" (FF 118).

By using the notion of common-sense and logic to open up differing perspectives and reveal the illogicality of the authoritative patriarchal tradition I would agree with Jan Montefiore that revisions carried out this way appear to be themselves logical and viable. She writes: "the feminist mythology seems to me not...an indulged fantasy but an important way of imagining--and therefore creating--the possibility of a woman-centred discourse" (Montefiore 85).

Namjoshi's revisions, by creating space for differing perspectives, also focus on what might be called the primary figures of the patriarchal canon, the sanskrit Panchatantra, Chaucer, and Shakespeare. These are what can be considered the "bare bones" of the English and Indian canons. Namjoshi places her writing in an intertextual relationship with these texts, but does not place her writing in comparison for valuation with them. The relationship she creates is one in which the influence is reciprocal.

Namjoshi begins Feminist Fables with a fable titled "From the Panchatantra". It is in fact a pastiche of the fables in the Panchatantra written as a feminist interpretation of the misogyny of the text. The fable describes the attitude of a Brahmin who considers women to be inferior and lacking in human status. He prays to a god for a boy but is sent a girl by mistake. Rather than reject her he brings her up as he would a son and she becomes well educated and wise. The result is that she is everything that the Brahmin wanted in a son. However, the girl has one flaw which makes the Brahmin dissatisfied: she is female. By beginning Feminist Fables with this fable Namjoshi highlights the attitude towards women in the Panchatantra. This reveals the limitations which patriarchal tradition imposes on women and introduces it as a context for Namjoshi's work. In fact, as the Panchatantra is considered to have influenced the very beginnings of Indian and European literature (I refer here to

the claims of Mahajan), she places her work in an intertextual relationship of opposition with the very base of literature.

In allusion to Chaucer, the fable "The Loathly Lady" (FF 19) is a rewriting of "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and it begins with a quotation from the tale which sets the two texts in comparison and in collusion. However, rather than being a revision, the rewriting is a pessimistic and ironic reading of Chaucer's tale. In Chaucer's tale a knight found guilty of rape is saved from a penalty of death, through the mercy of the women at Arthur's court, on condition that he finds what it is that women really want. The answer is provided to him by an "old hag" who answers, with the understanding that she is allowed a wish in return. She tells him, "Wommen desiren to have sovereynte / As wel over hir housbond as hir love, / And for to been in maisterie hym above" (The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Tale": 1038-1040). She wishes him to marry her, which he does to fulfil the promise, and she soon turns into a beautiful young woman, his prize. There are many complaints that can be made from the feminist perspective about this tale, but Namjoshi focuses on the irony that it is not a woman who is asked to carry out this task and that far from gaining mastery over her man, which is what the old hag claims women want, she complies to patriarchy, by supernaturally changing herself into the ideal woman. Namjoshi adds a further element to the plot which

emphasises the double dilemma for women and the irony in the tale. In her version of the tale the women are asked to find the answer: "A few step forward, but their husbands object, their fathers object, their children are too young and besides it's improper" (FF 19). The result is that the knight is chosen and the tale continues as expected. Namjoshi's conclusion is heavily ironic and bitter, considering the context of the tale is in a book of Feminist Fables. She concludes:

> The answer's a good one and the men laugh.... Nothing is changed, no one is hurt, and even the knight is satisfied because the loathly damsel is turned overnight into a beautiful woman. Chivalry flowers. They are all of them gallant, and have shown some concern for the woman question (FF 19).

The tale pessimistically reveals the extent of the seeming all pervasive patriarchal system and its rigidity and resistance to change from differing perspectives.

Namjoshi's revision of Shakespeare is more optimistic. She explores a lesbian interpretation of Act 1 Scene 5 from Twelfth Night (The Works of Shakespeare, "Twelfth Night; or, What You Will", 259-318). In this scene Viola has been sent in male clothing to woo Olivia on behalf of Orsino. The comical effect of Olivia's attraction to Viola is emphasised and Olivia is presented to the audience as an object of amusement. In Shakespeare's version there is no acknowledged

possibility of a lesbian relationship; Olivia falls in love with the boyish looks of Viola. Namjoshi, however, poses the possibility that perhaps Viola would have seduced Olivia for herself, rather than acting as Orsino's proxy, and perhaps they both knew that the other was a woman: "But suppose that Viola had also been charmed, charmed to the point of a little indiscretion?... Because Olivia does charm. And when was Olivia less than graceful?" (FF 92). This question introduces a lesbian reading strategy for this Shakespeare text and the reader is made acquainted with the possibility of new perspectives.

The introduction of this reading strategy also reveals the problems that lesbians face when reading canonical texts in which lesbian perspectives are not considered. Monique Wittig, writing as a lesbian critic, has expanded upon de Beauvoir's social commentary and notes that where women are defined in relation to men, those who have no relation to men are not defined at all, and are in effect non-existent. She claims, "Lesbian is the only concept I know which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man)" (53); in patriarchal terms lesbians are undefinable and do not exist. The non-existent status of lesbians is reflected in texts that maintain a patriarchal perspective and therefore create barriers to lesbian reading strategies.

Until I read Namjoshi I had not considered the possibilities of a lesbian reading strategy. This reading

strategy provides the possibility to consider the concept of a community of women, existing in their own right and in relation to each other. In Shakespeare's text Namjoshi finds the entrance to this possibility but the imagining of this community is independent of the text. In relation to the text it appears to me that Olivia and Viola would construct a community without men where they act in substitution for the men they exclude (remembering their relationship is built upon the assumption by Viola of a male role). This is not a utopia that I would condone, nor one which Namjoshi proposes, in my view.

Namjoshi also positions herself intertextually with writers exterior to the patriarchal canon. She writes a fable dedicated to Adrienne Rich--"For Adrienne Rich--If She Would Like It" (FF 70)--and has also written a section in From The Bedside Book of Nightmares titled "Snapshots of Caliban" which echoes Rich's series of ten poems "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law". The fable dedicated to Rich is a feminist revision of the story of Sheherazade from The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night, which she rewrites in two sections in Feminist Fables.

The first section is an introduction to the story of Sheherazade and describes how the Caliph, Shahryar, has power over the women in his Kingdom to sleep with each virgin he chooses and then kills them the following morning. Sheherazade volunteers to be his wife for a night in the hope

of being able to put an end to his killing of women. The first section, "Sheherazade" (FF 42), ends with the acceptance of Sheherazade as the new wife for the Caliph: "If she does not amuse him, she will die for it. This engages him" (FF 42).

The section "For Adrienne Rich--If She Would Like It" begins at the end of the thousand and one nights and describes Sheherazade collecting her prize from the Caliph for maintaining her virtue and being able to please the Caliph with her tales. The prize she chooses is her sister's smile, which reminds her that she has managed to save the women of her country. This is a feminist revision of the concluding chapter of The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night. In the original text Sheherazade's reward is that the Caliph allowed her to live to be a mother to her children (The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night, 10: 54). It is only noted in addition that Sheherazade and her sister rejoice because she has saved the remaining women from the Caliph when he announces that Sheherazade has been his delivery from his revenge on women: "he arose from his seance and kissed her head whereat she rejoiced, she and her sister Dunyazad, with exceeding joy" (The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night, 10, 55). Namjoshi's ending therefore brings the original purpose and heroism of Sheherazade back into the reader's focus and does not praise the Caliph's reward.

This is a particularly apt story to revise as a gesture

to Rich as the story basically is that of a woman who saves women from the power of patriarchy by telling tales. This can be regarded as a definition of feminist fiction, although I would add that the exclusion of men from this definition makes it weak as both male and female feminist writers can tell tales to save both men and women from the power of patriarchy. However, Namjoshi does appear to be answering a call from Rich by carrying out revisions of the canonical text that she confronts and rewrites. In her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", Rich claims: "Revision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction--is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (35). Namjoshi's revisions achieve this exactly. The revisions create new perspectives and versions of canonical texts which are accessible to women and feminists. They draw the texts into a critical context where they are not limited by an authoritative interpretation, and break down the patriarchy's power.

By citing Rich, Namjoshi also indicates her allegiance to another body of writing (I call it a body in order to avoid using the word canon which brings with it the notions of hierarchy and ordained value). This draws the reader's attention to the existence of alternative bodies of writing to the patriarchal canon, and by doing so reduces the value and authority attributed to it. By negotiating her cross-

canonical position between the revisions of the patriarchal canon and her allegiance to another body of writing, Namjoshi in effect breaks down canonical boundaries.

The Political Possibilities of Namjoshi's Form and Discourse.

It appears to me that the space which Namjoshi creates for her writing is one which crosses the boundaries imposed by patriarchy and contains an intertextual relationship of revision with patriarchal texts. This space is noticeably similar to that created by the post-colonial discourse of magic realism, in which there are two discursive systems working in a frictional, yet co-operative relationship.

Stephen Slemon defines this discourse thus: "In the language of narration in a magic realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other" (10). In Namjoshi's text the battle is between that of the multiple perspectives of the revisions and alternative bodies of literature, and the monologic patriarchal and Orientalist limitations. The intertextual relationship of Namjoshi's work to the canon is multi-directional and reciprocal. Neither one nor the other text dominates. Namjoshi does not institute a matriarchal canon. She creates a friction that reduces the texts into equal battle. The two systems appear to be in a contradictory state

of mutual reliance and friction. In Namjoshi's writing this can be attributed to the breaking down of the boundaries by the revisions which the patriarchal texts continually resist. Holmstrom writes that in Namjoshi's texts, "What is of interest is the tension or negotiation between such worlds and the sudden sharp slippage from one onto the other" (xii).

Slemon emphasises this equality within the struggle, claiming that there are "two discursive systems, with neither managing to subordinate or contain the other" (12). It is this discursive system that reduces the authority of the patriarchal text and simultaneously, because the struggle is equal, allows the introduction of alternative perspectives into a space that is not always already defined and valued.

CHAPTER 2

Constructing a Place for Resistance in the Margins

> She wanted to sing, but there were no songs, at least none she might sing to another woman. She wanted a voice. She wanted gestures. She wanted a manner. And there were none to be had (FF 45).

> I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me I will have to stand and claim my own space, making a new culture - una cultura mestiza (Anzaldúa 22).

In this chapter, by analysing recurring characters from Namjoshi's fables and longer pieces of fiction, which she calls prose satires (BI 124), I work towards an understanding of her concept of self-identity and societal relationships. The characters of Valerie in The Mothers of Maya Diip, the Blue Donkey in The Mothers of Maya Diip and The Blue Donkey Fables, and Suniti in The Conversations of Cow, all find themselves in situations which call into question their subjectivity, that is their ability to define and present their identities. In her writing these characters go through a series of situations which bring them and, by implication, the reader to an understanding of the concept of

identity and lead them through an exploration of the subject positions available to them in relation with society.

Each of these three characters is of interest to me because of their position outside the fictional societies and situations in which the reader witnesses them in interaction. Travis-lane notes that Namjoshi's "poetic personae do not speak from the centre of their universe. They are peripheral to it" (97). The characters are also peripheral to the conventional western patriarchal order, which is the context in and against which the texts were written and are being read. Namjoshi's writing reveals a similar attitude towards fictionality as that of Trinh T. Minh-ha, who writes:

> Literature and history once were/still are stories: this does not necessarily mean that the space they form is undifferentiated, but that this space can be articulated on a different set of principles, one which may be said to stand outside the hierarchical realm of facts (121).

The importance of Namjoshi's form of writing is that she imagines and realises a space in her text outside patriarchy where the "other" is given the imaginative space to recognise her/his identity and construct her/his subject positions.

All the characters I have mentioned can be analyzed in the context of Simone de Beauvoir's theory which is an examination of the idea of Hegelian subjectivity from a feminist perspective. Namjoshi's concept of self and feminist community refers to and answers de Beauvoir's The Second Sex.

Hegel assumed the existence of an ego which is a process of thought-affirming consciousness. Consciousness, in turn, is the recognition of the existence of self in relation to others and through the senses. Each ego seeks freedom by affirmation of its existence beyond doubt by forcing another to recognize it. The ego aims ultimately to be universally recognised and to incorporate all it perceives as "other" into itself. This causes a struggle between egos which results in the development of a master/slave relationship. The master incorporates the "other" into her/his ego in a form of certain self-recognition; the slave is then reliant upon the master for recognition of her/his existence.

De Beauvoir called this the tragedy of human consciousness and noted that "each separate consciousness aspires to set himself [herself] up alone as sovereign subject. Each tries to fulfil himself [herself] by reducing the other to slavery" (171). In other words, humans want the power to define their identities at the expense of and in confrontation with others' identities creating conflict between the interests of each ego. Namjoshi renamed this concept "warring egos" (BI 83).

The result of this conflict is that the situation of women in patriarchal society is "Other", and they invariably find themselves in the situation of servant. In brief, man is definitive and woman "is defined and differentiated in reference to man" (de Beauvoir 16). Any woman who struggles

for recognition of her identity therefore finds herself in the situation which de Beauvoir named the "drama of woman":

> the conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego)--who always regards the self as essential--and the compulsions of a situation in which she is inessential (29).

In recognition of my concentration on the work of de Beauvoir I wish to make it clear that I read her comments concerning a sexist form of "otherisation" (the process by which one becomes an object defined by another person, taken from Spivak) as applicable to alternative forms of "otherisation". For instance, Namjoshi is other in terms of gender and sex (woman), race (Asian) and sexual preference (lesbian). I am aware that this may appear to be subsuming the difference between the prejudices that each of the "others" in separate categories faces, yet in Namjoshi's case these categories of prejudice appear mingled and are difficult to define in isolation. I regard Namjoshi in the light of Barbara Smith's comment that she receives prejudice directed at her as a woman of colour, and not separately just as a woman or just as a coloured person (de Lauretis 134).

In this chapter I look at specific characters who find themselves in particular, problematic situations: as immigrants into a different society, or as "other" in patriarchal terms. The characters are all endowed with what Namjoshi calls "warring egos" (BI 83), which implies that

each character values their own perspective above those of others. From these situations the characters necessarily find themselves caught in the dilemma that the "other" faces in finding their subject positions in relation to society.

Anzaldúa suggests that the "other" should negotiate these situations and avoid a conflict of the ego by examining her/his designated social roles and subject positions, defining her/his identity in opposition to them. She recognises women's identity in relation to men as his "nightmarish pieces, his shadow beast" (17) and calls upon "others" to "confront the shadow beast in the mirror" (20). She calls upon the "other" to recognise and deny her/his patriarchal image and form an identity from non-recognition of this image, dismissing the power of patriarchy. This is an act of appropriation of the patriarchal power to define by appropriating the very definition it produces. It allows resistance to the reliance upon a master/patriarchy for definition, and provides the means to continue political change in a space which is simultaneously defined by patriarchy and redefined by the "other".

Valerie

Valerie is actually quite a minor character from The Mothers of Maya Diip but I am beginning with her because she is by far Namjoshi's most caught up and confused character for whom there is no "happy ending", and who does not gain an

understanding of identity. Valerie is a western heterosexual immigrant to Maya whose point of reference is exterior to her new cultural context. To confuse matters she is heterosexual in a world without men.

Valerie finds herself in a comparable position to a lesbian in patriarchal society. Maya is a matriarchy on the island of Maya Diip (meaning "illusory island") where normal relations are lesbian and society is structured as a hierarchy in which all males are valueless. In Maya men do not exist, and males are called "pretty boys" (out of kindness, making up for their assumed inferiority). The "pretty boys" are defined in terms of their relationship to women in whose opinion it is thought "that except for the semen the lives of the pretty boys are perfectly pointless" (53). In this matriarchy only women are important and have adult human status, and heterosexuality does not exist. The matriarchy at the beginning of the novel appears to be a reversal of patriarchy (where there is a hierarchy of wealth and status) and only the Mayan perspective is recognised (the reader learns that Princess Asha was banished for showing concern for the "pretty boys").

Valerie can be seen as an immigrant, according to Daphne Marlatt's useful distinction of the perspective inherent in the word, which suggests "a leaving something behind (with its backward look)" (219). Valerie's point of reference and her perspective are western, derived from her previous

cultural context, and she uses this perspective to establish her identity in the new cultural context. Like the other characters I will be examining in this chapter, Valerie is conventional in that she assumes that she has a unitary identity formed in patriarchal society; yet she also understands that as a woman, she is not able to define herself. In Maya Valerie searches for an opportunity to define her identity as "a woman amongst women" (MMD 13). The use of the phrase "woman" is particularly apt if one condifers it in the context of de Beauvoir's theory. "Woman" is the patriarchal definition of attributed to women and Valerie defines herself partially within the patriarchal tradition of the west.

Valerie is in a position of culture shock. "One aspect of culture shock", Namjoshi writes, "is that one is not recognised--in both senses of the word" (BI 14). Valerie finds that her points of reference are either non-communicable, or not of interest to the Mayans and she feels, in Namjoshi's words, like "Nobody from Nowhere" (BI 14). For example, as the Mayans do not recognise men, they do not have the concept of heterosexuality in their culture or language. Valerie therefore finds her identity unacknowledged and resents the Mayans for their ignorance (willed or not). She complains "They don't seem to understand or even want to understand who I am or what I've been " (MMD 52).

The problem does not arise solely because of the

Mayans' ignorance but is rooted in both parties' refusal to cross cultural boundaries. Valerie identifies herself as a heterosexual within and also against patriarchal western society. Although she finds it difficult to live on Maya she also acknowledges that "it's even less fun being a woman outside!" (MMD 53). Yet when the Blue Donkey asks her if she is heterosexual, she answers "Yes, of course I am" (MMD 53), and thereby acknowledges only the existence of heterosexual women, revealing that her perspective is still partially patriarchal.

Her position is exactly that of de Beauvoir's "drama of woman". Coming from the west where women are inessential, and trying to negotiate a new culture from her position of western non-subjectivity, Valerie is doubly "other". She is either a western woman (read "other") or a Mayan heterosexual (non-existent).

Valerie's attempts to define herself and have her identity acknowledged in Ashagad, Princess Asha's city, illustrate her problem perfectly. Ashagad is a matriarchy ruled by Asha who, banished from Maya, established a nation of "pretty boys". In this society there are no women, except for the matriarch, and the population is increased by the adoption of male babies who have been abandoned in the woodlands by the Mayan mothers. In order to define her identity in Ashan society Valerie finds it necessary to describe the heterosexual patriarchal society from which she

comes, and then define herself in opposition to it. She attempts to describe her society in the Ashan language, which means that she is unable to describe her culture adequately for the Ashans to understand.

Valerie is faced with the situation that Himani Bannerji describes when writing about Asian women's difficulties of self-expression, and particularly the expression of personal history, in English: the language in which they are always already "other". She asks the Asian reader:

> Are you haunted by this feeling, that as an Asian woman, what you will say about yourself, selves, about ourselves, will end up sounding still-born, distant, artificial and abstract--in short not quite authentic to you or us? (Bannerji 124).

Although Valerie's situation is the reverse of Bannerji's, and the Ashans do not speak an "imperial" language, her culture and identity cannot be expressed in their language.

When Valerie explains to the Ashans the structure of her patriarchal, heterosexual society, she uses the terms of "Ashans" and "Mayans" for "men" and "women". She explains: "The Ashans enslaved the Mayans and divided them up amongst themselves. The more important the Ashan, the more Mayans he owned" (MMD 84). The Ashans find this too distanced from their experience to understand. They are puzzled and ask: "But for what purpose would Ashans wish to enslave Mayans? And besides, how could they? Why didn't the Mayans stop

them?" (MMD 84). Valerie finds she is only able to answer this question in the terms used by feminists to reveal the ideology of patriarchy, and so she translates this into Ashan vocabulary: "Well, you see, only the Ashans existed, the Mayans did not exist" (MMD 84). This comment relies upon its social context, in which it is understood that the non-existence of women is not physical but ideological. To the Ashans, whose society includes only one woman, the physical absence of women is totally plausible, and Valerie's narrative seems entirely fictional to them.

The explanation becomes more complex when Valerie introduces the concept of heterosexuality to which the Ashans react by "looking a little sick" (MMD 87). When she realises she is not projecting a clear idea of her society, she stops, feeling entirely alien to the Ashans: "she was, she supposed, no more than a friendly creature from another species" (MMD 87-88).

Valerie's situation deteriorates further when she is imprisoned for being dangerous to the Ashans. In the chapter titled "Loathsome Reptile" Asha imprisons Valerie for telling the Ashans about patriarchal society. Jyanvi explains to Valerie that the danger Asha recognises in what Valerie has said is that she has given the Ashans "Knowledge of other possibilities...the knowledge that things might be other than they are" (MMD 86). Namjoshi alludes to the Garden of Eden in this chapter in which Valerie, acting in the position of the

serpent, tempts the Ashans to create a patriarchal society (since, despite her efforts, Valerie was not able to reveal her opposition to a system she could not properly explain). To atone for her deed she is told to find a direction for the feminist movement: "Find a way of convincing males that a male-dominated society is not in their interests" (MMD 97).

By the end of the novel Valerie is no closer to finding a space to define her identity. She remains exterior to the cultural context of Maya, and her perspective, not being translatable into Ashan or Mayan terms, is considered by them to be fictive. Valerie is last reported by the narrator to have warned the Mayans about invaders but "they had refused to believe her. The tale was incredible" (MMD 141).

Suniti

"What would happen if one let go of the identity one clings to so desperately?" (BI 84). This is the question explored by Namjoshi in her prose satire The Conversations of Cow. The first person narrator is Suniti, a lesbian Indian professor of English Literature in North America. This description biographically fits that of Namjoshi at the time of writing the text (1985), when she was resident in Toronto working at Scarborough College. So one can say, always bearing in mind the fictionality of the character Suniti, that Suniti is a projection of an identity associated personally with Namjoshi. This construction of a fictional

identity works to facilitate an exploration in the text of what happens when one lets go of one's identity. Namjoshi consciously places her character in the text in the knowledge that she will be interpreted and filled with meaning by the reader, and, in effect uses the character of Suniti to let go of her self-identity and explore the possible subject positions available to her in society through the fictionality of the text.

The text is a parodic version of a quest novel in which a protagonist goes on a journey and "finds" the "self" (I have in mind Melville's Moby Dick and the quest of Ishmael and Ahab in search of that multiple signifier, the white whale). Suniti invokes a goddess who is initially a cow but who is able to change her identity, including her personal appearance, at will. Suniti is concerned that she does not know her "self" and assumes that the goddess will help her find a unitary, essential identity. She asks the cow, "What's going to happen? Are we going on a quest?'...'You know, a journey of exploration. We undergo ordeals, and then I find out who I really am'" (CC 58). What Suniti discovers with the aid of Cow is that identity is fluid, exactly the opposite of what she expects.

Suniti's assumption that they are on a quest, an assumption not shared by Cow, reveals her conventional perspective. She considers the journey, and by implication, her life, in terms of literary conventions. When Suniti

suggests to Cow that they should get married, Cow objects and tells her she is being conventional: "'Two women can't get married. You're being carried away by literature'" (CC 89). In effect, Suniti limits her possible subject positions by only considering those she can recognise within a conventional perspective.

From a feminist perspective Suniti's conventionality is the very obstacle to her ability to feel comfortable with her identities. As an Indian lesbian woman she is triply "otherised" by the patriarchal society in which she lives. Suniti is unable to gain the ability to define her identity because she attempts to do so within the boundaries of patriarchal conventions. She is caught in a struggle with, and within, the system of patriarchy and although she recognises, and is anxious that she is denied subjectivity, she does not consider other positions from which to struggle against this.

Suniti's thoughts and actions reveal that she is sensitive to the problems of defining identity and of "warring egos". She is aware that she too is capable of forcing identities on others, as well as being the recipient of imposed identities, even though she is not fully aware of the systems allowing such impositions. She reveals sensitivity concerning others' identities in her meeting with Cow's friends (a collective of lesbian cows). In this episode Namjoshi presents Suniti's problems of identity, creating the

situation from which, by the help of Cow, she will negotiate her way toward an understanding of identity.

Suniti initially confronts the controversial idea of "difference". When she first meets Cow Suniti recognises that Cow is a Brahmini cow from India. However, she is unsure if an acknowledgement of this recognition would offend Cow. As Trinh T. Minh-ha notes "'difference' is essentially 'division' in the understanding of many" (82). Suniti wonders "How not to be personal? Or rather, how to be personal and politic as well?" (CC 14). The problem she faces is that she does not know whether Cow would be upset by being identified according to her appearance, since by doing so Cow would be reminded of her obvious difference from western Cows. Suniti, who is trying not to impose identities constructed from her perspective upon others, finds it difficult not knowing what identity would be acceptable to Cow. However, when Suniti comments about the curve of Cow's horns (her most notable difference from western cows), Cow does not object but "sounds complacent" (CC 14).

It appears to me that in this episode Namjoshi is suggesting an acceptable way to address the question of "difference". Suniti learns from this meeting the need for sensitivity and an awareness of the possible offence which can be caused, and the importance of a speaker's unwillingness to cause it.

Another problem arises for Suniti in this meeting since

she finds that the difference between Cow and herself is so great that she is unable to imagine Cow's perspective. She is unable to imagine or understand how a cow can live a life similar to that of humans. Her curiosity on the subject leads her to ask Cow about her life. She asks, "'What do you live on?'" (CC 14). Cow answers that she lives on welfare, but Suniti cannot imagine how she signs her cheque and so asks for more information. This time Cow is offended and replies curtly, "'I am not illiterate'" (CC 17). Suniti notes Cow's reaction and reflects: "I suspect her of finding my ignorance culpable" (CC 17). These two discussions of Cow's "difference" indicate to me that when Suniti speaks from a position of knowledge (as an Indian woman acknowledging Cow's Indian features in contrast to the western cows), Cow is complacent, whereas when Suniti speaks of Cow's difference from a position of ignorance, Cow is offended. Namjoshi presents the idea that offence concerning racial difference is the offence caused by a person considering others from their own perspective, a perspective which they consider to be the valued norm.

This situation is reversed when Suniti meets the collective of lesbian cows. The majority of the cows are western and Suniti finds herself the object of a form of Orientalism. Himani Bannerji describes being confronted in Canada with "A singular disinterest about us or the societies we come from,...[which] is matched equally by the perverted

orientalist interest in us (the East as a mystical state of mind of the West) and our own discomfort with finding a cultural-linguistic expression or form which will minimally do justice to ourselves and formations" (125). The cows whom Suniti meets exemplify this; they cannot pronounce her name the first time they hear it and so they flippantly rename her "Sue" for their convenience (and I will add to save themselves from a feeling of discomfort at having to recognise difference from their own culture). This is a blatant means for the cows to take control of Suniti's identity. By renaming her they reconstruct an identity for her in their own terms. Suniti, whose primary concern is to control her own subjectivity, is highly offended and concerned about this incident, but Cow is less concerned. The cows tell Suniti: "'Well, we'll just call you Sue for short,just as we do Baddy here.' Her real name is Bhadravati. I look at Cow, who looks away. Later she says to me, 'Well, you have to adjust'" (CC 18).

Having shown a disregard for their cultural identity and their subjectivity, the cow Sybilla then proceeds to associate Cow and Suniti with the orientalist idea of India as a mystical state of mind. She regards Cow and Suniti as curiosities, and extraordinary creatures who can supply her dreams of "India" with information. Sybilla proclaims "'Oh, I've always wanted to go to India. I dream about it'" (CC 19). This comment brings to mind Said's claim that the Orient

is a place that exists only in the minds of Orientalists who imagine it. India is a place which Sybilla imagines, and has not experienced; she constructs the idea of India from her position of ignorance. Sybilla's construction of India also further frustrates Suniti's attempts to control her identity, since not only is Suniti renamed, but her personal cultural history is appropriated and reconstructed by Sybilla, so that Suniti has no exterior point of reference.

Following this predicament the cows reveal to Suniti something very important and helpful: they introduce Suniti to the idea of projecting an identity to suit the needs of the situation in which one finds oneself. In effect the cows introduce Suniti to conventional social roles and begin the process in which Suniti is brought to an understanding that there are many subject positions and identities available to her. When Cow and Suniti are thrown out of a restaurant for being a cow and a lesbian, Cowslip gives them some advice about how to "pass" in society. Cowslip explains, in what appear to be oversimplified terms, how society is composed. Her description is that of the patriarchal order from the patriarchal perspective: "'The world, as you know, is neatly divided into Class A humans and Class B humans. The rest don't count'" (CC 24). She describes Class A and Class B humans in terms of a polarized opposition. They are described in terms of conventional gender roles eg. Class A is dominant and can be assumed to be men (class A people

don't wear make-up). Class B humans are women who hide themselves beneath make-up and are submissive: "'Class A people don't wear lipstick. Class B people do. Class A people spread themselves out. Class B people apologise for so much as occupying space'" (CC 24). The description has strong parallels with de Beauvoir's theory.

Cowslip decides that as a cow she best fits into category A and advises Suniti that to pass in society she must make herself appear to be either a Class A or a Class B human. This is Suniti's introduction to the idea of fluid identity which can be manipulated according to circumstance. This idea is explored further when Cow assumes various conventional social roles, in the company of Suniti, and illustrates her ability to manipulate and assume many identities and subject positions. Suniti is able either to recognise her self in the roles Cow adopts or to reject them. This process of recognition is carried out by Suniti's reaction to Cow's behaviour, and depends upon whether Suniti rejects or accepts Cow's enacting of each role.

Firstly Cow becomes a white man called Baddy and persuades Suniti to dress as a heterosexual woman by wearing make-up and being seen in the company of a heterosexual white man (class B and A humans). (Namjoshi's idea to use make-up as a signifier of heterosexual women is an attempt to show that women project their identity by their appearance which identifies them in their sexual role and only in reference to

men. This relies upon the reader associating make up with heterosexuality and to reject it on those terms.) Cow argues "'perhaps if you dressed up as a Class B human and I dressed up as a Class A, we'd manage better'" (CC 31). Suniti complies, and accompanied by Baddy they mimic the conventional roles which society expects them to follow.

Suniti's reaction to her examination of her self in the role is to note that "'Everyone seems to approve of us. I feel so good, so safe, so respectable...I belong!'" (CC 32). In other words, Suniti recognises that as a Class B human her subject position is unquestioned, and she fulfils the expectations of society. However she feels uneasy in this role and wonders: "'Aren't we being false to our true selves?'" (CC 32). This query is the key to the discussion of identity in this text. Suniti assumes she has a unitary self and questions the propriety of Cow's role play. Because she believes that she has a unitary and definable self she thinks her uneasiness derives from the falsity of their role play. What she does not recognise is that her uneasiness is the beginning of the process of relinquishing her ego.

Suniti comes to the realisation that identity is not necessarily unitary as a consequence of her new consciousness of language, and the language constructions through which one is able to discuss identity. When Cow becomes an Indian lesbian called "B" Suniti is taken aback, particularly because of the attraction she feels for B. She is unsure how

to react to B and when asked how she likes Cow's new role she answers, "'of course, B, you are always you whoever you are--if you see what I mean'. What on earth do I mean?" (CC 51). In this sentence she comes to realise that conventional language constructions such as this phrase are inadequate to communicate the idea of fluid identity. When Cow asks her why she has not seemed to be "herself", Suniti replies with irony and sarcasm aimed at Cow's confusing changes of identity: "'But I'm very much myself,'...'See, same person, same body'" (CC 55).

Despite having come to the realisation that identity need not be unitary and that that idea is a convention reinforced by language Suniti is still not able to think easily in these terms. She still thinks within the patriarchal system. She considers "I shall treat B exactly as though she were B, which she is, who she was, well as she would have been..." (CC 53).

The next stage of Suniti's coming to terms with identity occurs when Cow takes her to visit her sisters, who add to Suniti's confusion as they are from different racial and cultural backgrounds to Cow. In this household Suniti is given the opportunity to choose her own identity, but she feels uncomfortable choosing any one in particular. She plays with the idea: "I toy with the idea of being a talking dog, the life of the party, a prize poodle. I decide in favour of being a strong silent one. But then I see some water. I

would like to be a duck" (CC 70). The fluidity of identity at first feels awkward and out of Suniti's control. She is unsure of her identity from one moment to the next. She notes, "I feel like a small dog. It's perfectly possible that I am one" (CC 70). However, the sisters allow her to choose her identity without ever irrevocably realising her choice. This allows Suniti to consider several identities and eventually realise her happiness at being in a situation where she has total control over her subject positions:

> I feel so cheerful, I dance like Madeleine, I flutter like a bird. "I can be anything, anyone," I collapse on the floor in a small huddle, I peer at them coyly, "or no one" (CC 76).

From this point of realisation Suniti re-enters society, in the company of Buddy, Cow in the role of another man. This time, rather than feeling accepted by society, Suniti is upset by Bud's presence which she claims disallows her new found control over her subjectivity. She complains, "'When I'm with Bud in public, I become an appendage, a secondary person'" (CC 99); in other words Suniti comes to realise that, as de Beauvoir explains, a woman is only allowed a subject position in relation to a man.

Suniti rejects both Bud and her own subject position as a heterosexual woman in conventional society. She asks to be by "herself" for a while, which Cow allows--literally. Suniti wakes up the next morning with a clone of herself, called

"S2". She is literally faced with her own image and finds that she must come to terms with being in S2's company. This of course can be read as an allegory of Suniti's "coming to terms" with who she is at that particular moment. Interestingly, S2 is only identical to Suniti in appearance; she does not do exactly as Suniti does or wishes to do. For example when talking at the commune, S2 disgusts Suniti by being overly friendly to the cows in a way which Suniti would not. S2, in other words, occupies one of Suniti's subject positions which Suniti does not occupy at that time.

Suniti finally comes to terms with her identity when she dreams that the world falls apart and all that is left is her ego. In the dream her ego has only one quality, the quality of fear: "It is shapeless and composed of terror. It cannot penetrate the blackness round it. It cannot make any sound. But it's shrieking with the intensity of its own terror" (CC 120). She wakes up with tremendous anxiety about not knowing her self until she comes to the realisation that she is exactly who she is at that moment: "I'm supposed to be Suniti, that particular person with those preoccupations" (CC 121). Suniti accepts her identity as fluid, relinquishes her ego which is the fear of non-existence, and recognises her power to define her own identity while not conflicting with others. In effect Namjoshi provides an alternative to the psychology of conflicting egos. That is, existence can be confirmed with certainty by recognising the very fear and

desire for sovereignty that humans feel. By recognising the fear of the ego, the ego is assured of its own existence and so conflict does not have to take place.

Having learnt the fluidity of her identity and her ability to choose her subject positions, Suniti is introduced by Cow to the final element of feminist identity, that of equality. Like the Blue Donkey, Suniti has an identity which allows her to be constantly equal with all those around her. Cow tells her she is a goddess, just like herself, and proclaims "'you can't help it, Suniti. You're alive'" (CC 124). I take this to mean that all people are goddesses or gods because they have the ability to occupy many subject positions, like Cow who changes her identity at will. Added to this is the concept that all people are equally glorious, which I respond to as a highly optimistic notion.

The Blue Donkey

The Blue Donkey is a fantastical creature appearing in both The Blue Donkey Fables and The Mothers of Maya Diip. She is a character from a series of Chagall's paintings picturing rural life. Chagall is known for pioneering a painting style that emphasised the fantastical and played with the concept of reality and truth; he is called an "anti-rationalist" by Franz Meyer (14). Like Namjoshi, he produced his own painted version of La Fontaine's Fables when he was commissioned to illustrate the text. He used bright and unusual colours in

his paintings and has been described as a surrealist before surrealism (Meyer 14). Namjoshi's use of his character is poignant since it is the Blue Donkey who draws the reader's imagination into a creative space where the Blue Donkey is developed as a real and ordinary personality simultaneously as her fantastical nature prepares the reader for the exploration of an alternative reality. She is blue, able to speak, and communicates with both humans and animals alike. She represents a non-culturally specific "other" and allows Namjoshi to examine the coming-to-terms-with-identity of a character who is not always already defined by patriarchal ideology and thus can not be preconceived by the reader.

The Blue Donkey's exploration of and coming to terms with identity centres around Namjoshi's concern that "Identity isn't only a matter of self-definition. It also depends on the identity that other people attribute one" (BI 84). In the first of The Blue Donkey Fables the Blue Donkey experiences a conflict between her self-identity and the multiple identities which her acquaintances attribute to her. The Blue Donkey is informed by the authorities that she has to change her colour from blue to white, or at least grey, because she clashes with a red bridge. When she refuses the people argue amongst themselves about whether the Blue Donkey is just unwilling, or simply unable, to change her colour. In effect they argue amongst themselves about the qualities of a donkey: "'Obviously wilful!' 'No,no,' cried the other half.

'Patently flawed!' And they began to dispute amongst themselves. The donkey was puzzled.'I'm a perfectly good donkey'..." (BDF 1).

The exclusion of the Blue Donkey from this conversation is reminiscent of Trinh T. Minh-ha's observation that the position of the "other" is one where the empowered bar the "other" from subjectivity by prolonging the "other's" silence: "A conversation of "us" with "us" about "them" is a conversation in which "them" is silenced" (67). The Blue Donkey, however, is not aware that she cannot define her identity to others and is puzzled that others do not view her as she does. She reacts by telling them to "look again" (BDF 1). This indicates her naivety and her belief that there is only one truthful opinion, which she assumes she perceives. She does not recognise her position of marginality in the hierarchy of society, nor does she recognise that she is denied her subjectivity. What she fails to realise is that in terms of Orientalism she is the "object of study, stamped with an otherness" (Abdel Malek quoted by Said, Orientalism 99).

Rather than being dismissed for her blueness the Blue Donkey becomes accepted when she becomes a tourist attraction and is therefore useful to the people of the town. Ironically, she is then praised for her blueness, the difference which was previously scorned. Said astutely points out that "representations have purpose, they are effective

much of the time, they accomplish one or many tasks" (Orientalism 273). The Blue Donkey manipulates this fact when her colour changes to grey. She decides to project an identity that coincides with the identity that is attributed to her by the people of the town; she suggests "'Tell them that I have become a legend'" (BDF 3). They accept this representation because it caters to their desire to carry on the tourist trade centred around the Blue Donkey. She therefore manipulates her identity in order to respond to the demands of others.

In "The Last Word" (BDF 5) the Blue Donkey similarly finds that, "in spite all her efforts her friends heard what they wished to hear" (BDF 5), and so she tells lies which anticipate their desires. When her friends claim to understand the Blue Donkey's motives for retiring, she realises they are not accurate and tries to correct them. This reveals her concern to project her perspective which she assumes is more truthful than theirs: "She had tried to explain that both these versions were inexact, but it made little difference" (BDF 5). She soon realises that they, likewise, consider their own perspective to be the most truthful and so, rather than engaging in a battle of "warring egos", the Blue Donkey experiments and takes a step towards solving the conflictual aspect of human relations by changing her answers to suit her listeners.

It is interesting that the "lies" that the Blue Donkey

and the narrator recognise are only lies viewed through their perspective. Considering the Blue Donkey's "lies", the narrator notes that "she confined her lies to her own experience" (BDF 5). This suggests to me that the Blue Donkey speaks about her own experiences, yet describes them through the perspective that she assumes her listeners hold. She considers what she says to be untruthful because she continues to assume that her own perspective, in comparison, has more value. To the listeners and readers of her stories, the stories are truthful to the extent that they articulate an imaginable perspective on a series of events.

This episode is an exploration of what Namjoshi calls the situation of the "warring egos". The Blue Donkey is unwilling to acknowledge that other perspectives to her own have value because she wishes her ego to be the "sovereign subject" (using de Beauvoir's term). In order to avoid conflict the Blue Donkey must accept the possibilities of these other perspectives and relinquish the idea of a single truth which she believes only she holds. To do this she needs to recognise that her identity is not unitary and that there are multiple aspects of her identity which are the results of her interaction with other people. She must not battle against the identities imposed upon her but must explore them and recognise that the effect that she has on other people is part of her identity from a different perspective. This requires the Blue Donkey to come to terms with the existence

of other subject positions through a process of recognition, and to differentiate between her perception of her identity and others' perception of it without valuing one above the other.

Namjoshi's resolution of the Hegelian concept of conflict relies upon the precondition of an egalitarian world but within the patriarchal system certain subject positions are valued more highly than others. When the subject positions imposed or available to a person are negatively valued, that person has the choice either to resist and enter into conflict or to accept the negatively valued position. The feminist Bell Hooks provides a theoretical answer to the dilemma of the non-conflictual person placed in a negatively valued position. She recognises the possibilities of marginality in the patriarchal hierarchy as a space to be positively appropriated so that the value is placed on the margins, rebalancing that which the patriarchy places on its centre. She calls the margins "a site of radical possibility, a site of resistance" (Hooks 149), and it is this possibility that is the basis of Namjoshi's utopian community.

With this in mind I am led to read "Serious Danger" (BDF 83) as an allegory which affords insight into a society determined by its centre. In "Serious Danger" the narrator, Suniti, tells the Blue Donkey that she had a dream in which she had to choose to identify with one of two social groups: tigers or donkeys. Considering that tigers are symbols of

power in this collection of fables (eg. "The Disciple" or "Amongst Tigers") the choice between the two identities appears to be a choice between associating with a dominant or with a marginal group.

Suniti takes on both identities, one after the other, and compares her experiences. She claims, concerning tigers, "They had certain customs I didn't understand" (BDF 83) in which they prepared themselves as predators and killed for their food. The experience was too removed from her perspective and too distasteful to her, so that she is embarrassed to explain it to the Blue Donkey. When she became a donkey, however, she did not feel comfortable either: "I was allergic to grass" (BDF 83). The Blue Donkey does not accept this obstacle and asks Suniti to explain her predicament. Suniti concludes by admitting that she made an effort to like spinach instead, in order to remain a donkey and not become a tiger. The Blue Donkey hearing this questions "Is it really possible that you disliked spinach?" (BDF 83). Although this could be regarded as a truly "donkeyesque" reply (how could anyone not like spinach?), it can also be read as psychologically significant.

This sequence reveals the possibility of psychological resistance for a person to identify with a marginal group. Suniti finds the company of tigers unsuitable but resists the marginality of being a donkey by creating practical barriers to the assumption of this identity. The section can be read

as an allegory exploring the problems of relinquishing one's ego and the conflicts of the ego which this involves by accepting a position of marginality. Relinquishing one's ego involves changing one's habits and finding alternatives to situations which one cannot live with, so that if one cannot live by accepting imposed marginality one re-creates a marginality for one's self (eating spinach because one is allergic to grass).

In The Mothers of Maya Diip the Blue Donkey chooses a position of marginality on her entrance into her new cultural (Mayan) context. She chooses to be celibate in a society where celibates are sacred and considered asexual. She is therefore beyond the ordering system of the society which is based on reproductive ability and gender, and cannot be allotted the social roles imposed upon Mayan women. Her position is such that she is able to exploit a fluid identity and participate in society by adopting multiple subject positions and perspectives.

Unlike Valerie, who resists the imposed role of mother, the Blue Donkey acts as a free agent, acting the role of mother with ease when she is in the company of Mayan children. A minor incident in the text demonstrates the struggle with which Valerie and Jyanvi enforce their subjectivity, and reveals that the Blue Donkey has relinquished her ego. This incident, although of little importance to the plot, is one of the only incidents where

all three characters' reactions to one incident can be compared. When the grandchild of the matriarch, Gagri the Good (a title contrary to her nature), gives Valerie and Jyanvi a shock by creeping up behind them, they do not act appropriately like a Mayan mother: they both cry out and by doing so reveal their displeasure with Gagri. They react by forcing their perspective to be taken into account in a situation in which the perspective of Gagri, as a Mayan child, is the only one that counts. Jyanvi, in fact, objects to the role of a Mayan mother because she is forced to be a servant to children and is denied her subjectivity.

In reacting against Gagri, Jyanvi and Valerie reveal their warring egos and their desire to have their own subject positions taken into account. The Blue Donkey, on the other hand, behaves like a Mayan mother: "Valerie jumped. Jyanvi shouted. And the Blue Donkey said to Gagri gently,'You musn't do that dear'" (MMD 54). The Blue Donkey, therefore, acts perfectly in accord with the role of mother by choice. She does not force her identity in opposition to Gagri, but she recognises herself in the role of mother and acts as a free agent, creating her identity from the choices available to her.

Likewise, when the Matriarch, usurped by her daughters Shyamila and Pramila, takes the Blue Donkey to the forest, she objects to being called "Your Majesty". She claims that she and the Blue Donkey are ordinary creatures. She tells the

Blue Donkey, "This is a forest and in a forest every creature is only itself. You are a donkey and I am an old woman" (MMD 65). In this situation they are both beyond the ordering of Mayan society and are not judged or valued and placed in a hierarchy. They both become "ordinary"; that is, they relinquish their warring egos and accept that they are both of equal and non-defined value. I do note one flaw with this particular incident which is that the Blue Donkey is actually forced to be "ordinary" by the Matriarch. This flaw highlights the need for ordinariness to be adopted voluntarily by individuals and points out the impossibility of this system in a state ordered on these principles.

While in the forest the Matriarch and the Blue Donkey are found by the Ashans. This confrontation scares Jyanvi who is disturbed by the Matriarch and the Blue Donkey's lack of concern. Jyanvi feels unsafe and uncertain in a situation where she cannot predict or prepare herself for what is to happen next:

> Anything could happen. They were no longer in a city governed by women. Of course, not that Maya had been altogether safe, but still... Didn't the Matriarch and the Blue Donkey care? (MMD 71).

In becoming "ordinary" and accepting the fluidity of their identities, the Matriarch and the Blue Donkey foil any attempt to place and fix them into a hierarchy. Thus they are able to adapt to new perspectives and situations without

needing to protect their identity and perspective against all others. Similarly, the concluding fable in The Blue Donkey Fables appears to offer the "ordinary" identity as the utopian form of identity and a prescriptive suggestion for the future of feminist relations and subjectivity.

In the final fable, "Nocturne" (BDF 103), the Blue Donkey finds a space where she feels entirely comfortable and at ease with her identity and relation to others. The Blue Donkey is asleep in a forest, alone and unobserved, except for the ever present narrator and reader. In this situation she feels comfortable with the knowledge that she has successfully negotiated her cultural context: "It was all right, she told herself, donkeys had slept under the moonlight before--in Shakespeare for example" (BDF 103), and does not feel the need to establish her ego in relation to any other. Alone in the wood she considers herself to be free from imposed identities and free to define her identity without coming into conflict with others. The Blue Donkey is conscious that she has made the decision to define her self, at that moment, as a sleeping donkey and is aware of yet not resistant to the identities that would be associated with her in that subject position. In addition, the reader and narrator observe and create an identity for the donkey within the possibilities that the donkey has preconceived. One element that makes this identity feasible is the fluidity of the identity that the Blue Donkey chooses for herself. In her

mind the Blue Donkey "saw herself as an ordinary creature" (BDF 103) and in this subject position the Blue Donkey is able to adapt and be non-extraordinary in all situations. She does not involve herself in wars with other egos and does not impose identities on others by prioritising her own perspective.

As an allegory the fable suggests that the self can anticipate and preconceive an identity that is both projected by the self and imposed by another. To do this the Blue Donkey retreats into a marginal space where she recognises her self in relation to others and to her cultural context. The Blue Donkey creates a subject position for herself by recognising, appropriating and manipulating her imposed marginal identity, and by doing so makes her marginal subject position her own. In this position she is free to avoid wars of the ego and in fact enters into a utopian space where she is free to act in accordance with Namjoshi's concept of self and community.

Towards a Feminist Discourse and Community

The understanding of identity I gain from Namjoshi's writing is one which proposes that identity is constructed from an awareness of the possibilities of one's multiple subject positions, which are constantly shifting and changing. This is an idea which I see reinforced by such theorists as Gloria Anzaldúa and Elizabeth Meese and which

provides the basis for the struggle of resistance against patriarchal definitions. It provides an acceptance of fluidity and a reluctance to fix definitions, allowing for multiple perspectives of equal value.

When an "other" chooses to recognise her/his marginal subject positions and appropriate them as her/his own, s/he appropriates the power of definition and re-defines the margins, re-creating them as her/his own space to contest the hierarchical value of the centre. Anzaldúa calls her particular form of marginal identity a "mestiza consciousness", and perceives this consciousness as a form of contesting the patriarchy. Chandra Mohanty describes Anzaldúa's form of consciousness as "a plural consciousness in that it requires understanding multiple, often opposing ideas and knowledge, and negotiating these knowledges..." (36).

> This form of consciousness is particularly important for the future of feminism, as Mohanty describes:
>
> This writing/speaking of a multiple consciousness, one located at the juncture of contests over the meanings of racism, colonialism, sexualities, and class, is thus a crucial context for delineating third world women's engagement with feminisms (36).

Namjoshi's writing therefore provides the concept of a form of personal identity which can be used in the wider political sphere, in order to produce a feminist community

distinct from the patriarchal order which it contests and redefines. This lends support to de Lauretis's call for:

> the understanding of feminism as a community whose boundaries shift and whose differences can be expressed and renegotiated through connections both interpersonal and political (137).

Conclusion

> To identify oneself absolutely within oneself, to identify one's 'I' with the 'I' that I tell is as impossible as to lift oneself up by one's hair.[2]

The concept of self-identity that I derive from Namjoshi's writing is that of a thread of ever-changing perspectives, woven through differing circumstances and cultural contexts, all of which are mutually influencing, integrated and indivisible fibres of the thread. In this way no one context is subordinated or privileged above the other. The utopian ideal of community that Namjoshi constructs in her fiction is an extension into a larger space of this concept of self. Each self is a fibre and a constituent of the community in which no one fibre is dominant and all are mutually influencing, where all the fibres are "ordinary" and hierarchy does not exist.

As utopian as this idea may be, Namjoshi's form acts as an illustration of this egalitarian concept. Stephen Slemon's commentary on Magic Realism as post-colonial discourse leads me to regard Namjoshi's use of form as a political action. Her form of revisionary commentary and rewriting of canonical texts produces multiple threads of discourse which intertwine and disallow hierarchy. Therefore the very discourse itself

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[2] Mikhailovich Bakhtin (Grant 310)

illustrates the possibilities of this utopia.

Her writing, by alluding to and revising texts, places itself into a mutually influencing intertextual, cross-cultural relationship with other texts. By doing so, the texts are in a reciprocal relationship where they intermingle and the edges between texts become blurred. The body of literature in which Namjoshi writes becomes a mutually supporting and influencing body of text where there are no boundaries, ordering cannot take place, and hierarchy does not exist.

If I were asked to categorize Namjoshi's writing, the understanding that I have gained of her concept of self and community would guide me to resist any attempt to fix her into any national or formal category. Her writing draws on Indian, North American and European points of reference but these are changed by the very fact that Namjoshi perceives them through her multiple cultural perspective. She relates them in English, and they are changed again by the reader's reception of them. Lakshmi Holmstrom has commented, "That an Indian story comes from London or Norwich or wherever alters the entire notion of what an 'Indian' story is" (xiv), and I would add that Namjoshi's Indian influence intertwined with her perspective alters the notion of what an English or Greek story is. The problem that I find with attempting to consider these cultural influences is that the influences of a culture on a person produce new perspectives intermingled with

previously held perspectives. The effect is that influences cannot be singly distinguished and categorized.

Trinh T. Minh-ha notes that "Despite our desperate, eternal attempts to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak" (94). While I was writing this thesis, this comment consistently forced its way into my conscience. Originally I considered Namjoshi as an Indian writer in English but her work resists such easy categorizing (why did I feel this need to categorize her?). I feel comfortable calling Namjoshi's writing cross-cultural in that it is a synthesis of multi-cultural perspectives and influences which cannot be dissected and separately identified.

Another statement that I can make concerning Namjoshi's work is that it is feminist. Throughout her work I found echoes of de Beauvoir's thinking yet I feel reluctant to associate Namjoshi entirely with de Beauvoir since she uses her theory only as a basis to elaborate, negotiate and develop. The multiple theoretical milieu which I found provided an insightful perspective through which to study Namjoshi's writing resists association of Namjoshi's work with any one theoretical view point or school.

However, the theorist whose work I would like to consider further in relation to Namjoshi is that of Elizabeth Meese whose work in <u>(Ex)Tensions</u> is useful for considering the feminist utopia which Namjoshi proposes. Initially I was considering cross-cultural feminism through the work of

Anzaldúa. It was Anzaldúa's work on La Mestiza which led me to read Namjoshi in inclusive terms. I refer in particular to her hope that La Mestiza would bring "movement away from set patterns and goals, toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes" (79). I began to recognise in Namjoshi's work the concepts of intermingling and inseparable categories and the creation of a utopia in the margins. Although Anzaldúa's work was useful in bringing me to this point, it did not entirely satisfactorily apply to Namjoshi since the theory appears to work towards a fixed goal, that is, a whole perspective which will exist and include all. The fixity of this concept seemed to go against the work of La Mestiza, whose shifting formations, and breaking down of barriers is more a process than a goal. In contrast, Elizabeth Meese's work does emphasise the importance of process which Namjoshi's work requires of a theory with which it is to be associated.

Meese emphasises the plurality of feminist perspectives and the creation of a feminist theorizing process rather than a feminist theory. She works towards "feminism(s) [as] a contra/dictory space for polyphonous forms" (<u>(Ex)Tensions</u> 28). This requires that "respect be granted and that positions be negotiated rather than consolidated and insisted upon" (<u>(Ex)Tensions</u> 28). This concept is the closest theoretical stance to Namjoshi's concept of a multiple ever changing self, and inclusion of all changing perspectives

into an egalitarian community without limiting boundaries or fixed definitions.

This thesis illustrates the ways in which Namjoshi breaks down barriers to writing and in that writing clears a creative space to produce a discourse and form whose structure emulates the structure of her political aims. I query whether the concepts of community proposed by Namjoshi and Meese are possible, and whether they are applicable outside the creative writing space. My question is similar to that of Radhakrishnan's self-criticism of his reaction to a film which he felt was particularly monological. He asks his reader: "If my real complaint was that the film did not have room for multiple conflicting and contradictory narratives, was I not guilty of a similar insensitivity?" (279). If we are to follow Namjoshi and assume an egalitarian community are we not rejecting the perspectives of those requiring hierarchy? Indeed, is it really possible to exclude hierarchy?

Namjoshi's community relies upon the voluntary acceptance and adoption of "ordinariness" by people to allow equality of perspectives. Yet Namjoshi's fictional utopias do not always appear to be consistent. Remember that the Matriarch imposes ordinariness onto the Blue Donkey. Similarly, the soldiers from the patriarchal west who come to Ashagad to rescue Valerie and are only briefly and negatively introduced into the text as ridiculous and semi-human,

reliant upon their helicopter and weapons for security and food. They are the only society in the text with whom there is no resolution. In fact they are not considered in the denouement of the text because they cause their own deaths by overfeeding on their support system. It seems that Namjoshi's concept of self and community is one that excludes hierarchy, particularly in the form of patriarchy.

My final question, which Namjoshi crucially fails to negotiate, is: can patriarchy and equality truly exist in a system which assumes both aspects to simultaneously exist, and if so, will the feminist aspects be subsumed by patriarchy? My conclusion is that where these two elements exist the emphasis must be placed on process, upon the possibilities of gradually appropriating the power to define, changing patriarchy and eradicating its dependence upon hierarchy (if this is possible), creating a system of multiple centres of value and power, such as Meese suggests (Crossing the Double Cross 150). Ultimately Namjoshi's concept of community is flawed because it does not emulate the egalitarian structure of her discourse. The formation of a new community relies upon the transformation of patriarchy and its relationship with feminism, so that they ultimately become intermingled and mutually influencing.

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